



Kit Bond

Sixth Generation Missourian

<http://bond.senate.gov>

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VETERANS NEWS

A Letter to our Veterans

As Chairman of the Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee (VA-HUD), I am committed to improving veterans' care. It is unacceptable that over 200,000 veterans are waiting six months or longer for non-emergency care. I am especially concerned for the unconscionable burden this has placed on our top priority veterans, those that have service-connected disabilities, lower income, or are in need of specialized services.

I am pleased that the President's fiscal year 2004 budget that Congress passed recently, provides over a 10 percent increase in funding for veterans programs over the last fiscal year level. This includes the largest increase ever for veterans health. This administration, including Secretary of Veterans Affairs Principi, shares our concern in improving the services to veterans. Congress will continue to play a crucial role and I assure you that veterans' medical care is my top priority for the VA-HUD subcommittee.

There's no doubt that we need to improve compensation and claims processing, but we're also working on finding solutions to improve training, reduce error rates and increase accountability within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). It is clear that the culture within VHA needs vast improvements, which is one reason why I cannot support moving the VHA budget off-budget, like the Social Security Administration. If the budget was removed from direct Congressional oversight, I am certain that we would lose the ability to act on VHA's deficiencies. For years I've worked to eliminate waste and abuse, such as recent events at the Veterans Hospital in Kansas City, and my efforts have been successful in large part because of the leverage we have over appropriations.

Also, I have heard from many of you on concurrent receipt, which is why I am again cosponsoring legislation during the 108th Congress authorizing full concurrent receipt. Senate bill 392 would permit retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service connected disability to receive both military retired pay by reason of their years of military service and disability compensation from the VA. Unfairly penalizing veterans financially for their service-connected disabilities is an injustice that must be ended.

We are also looking into the inefficiencies caused by the VHA in its requirements for filling prescriptions. Eligible veterans are seeking the

pharmacy benefits available within the VHA but cannot have their prescriptions filled when written by physicians not associated with the VHA. As a result these veterans must get an appointment with a VHA physician simply to fill a prescription they already have from a non-VHA doctor. My staff is currently investigating this 'rationale' and its impact on costs and waiting lines.

While I cannot guarantee that we'll agree on every remedy for improving veterans care and benefits, I can guarantee you that I'll continue to seek your counsel and give the utmost consideration to common sense proposals aimed at supporting our core constituency, those veterans who have service connected disabilities, lower incomes or need specialized services.

You have my utmost respect and admiration for the service you've rendered this country. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of service.

Kit Bond Asks Missouri Families to Tie Yellow Ribbons for Troops and Pows

Senator Kit Bond recently tied a yellow ribbon to an old oak tree on his property in rural Mexico, Missouri in support of U.S. combat troops and POWs in Iraq. Bond took the occasion to ask

all Missouri families to do the same after selecting a tree on their property or the grounds of a local school, church or town-hall.

"Not every American supports this war to liberate Iraq, but we all can support our troops in combat and those who have been captured," said Bond, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. "A yellow ribbon is a symbol of that support and a reminder that the peace we enjoy at home is paid by our troops in harm's way."

The symbolic act can serve as a powerful lesson to young children and teenagers. "Each generation of Americans has an obligation to teach the next that freedom is not free," said Bond. "Freedom is a gift that carries a heavy responsibility. And part of that responsibility is to support our troops and prisoners-of-war."

The tying of a yellow ribbon around a tree to support troops is a relatively new American tradition. It blossomed during the 1979-1981 Iranian hostage crisis and became a full-blown American tradition during the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War. Some believe it had its roots in the early 1970s popular song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Around the Old Oak Tree."

Bond Joins Bi-partisan Legislation To Help Disabled American Veterans

Senator Kit Bond recently announced that he



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will cosponsor a bi-partisan piece of legislation (S.392) that would stop the government from unfairly penalizing veterans financially for their service connected disabilities.

"The men and women who have dedicated their lives to defending our freedom deserve nothing less," said Bond, who made the announcement during a recent visit with the Disabled American Veterans. "I am happy to support a measure that will increase the care and compensation our veterans receive."

S. 392 will allow service-disabled military retirees to receive concurrently their military retired pay and their disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Bond Receives VFW's Highest Award

Senator Kit Bond recently accepted the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) 2003 Congressional Award.

"I am honored to receive an award from the men and women who have dedicated their lives to defending our freedom," said Bond, chairman of the Senate subcommittee that funds the Department of Veterans Affairs, among others. "I will continue to fight to ensure veterans receive the care and compensation they more than deserve."

The VFW Congressional Award is the highest honor the Veterans of Foreign Wars can award to members of Congress. In recognition of his "outstanding service to the nation," Bond was awarded the 2003 honor during the March VFW Legislative Reception which featured a speech by the President of the United States.

In addition to the VFW's highest Congressional

honor, Bond will have a \$2,500 scholarship funded by the VFW in his name. The scholarship will help a graduate student in political science or government at a Missouri school.

Bond Thanks Deployed Missouri National Guard Unit for Patriotic Duty

Senator Bond thanked the 1438th Engineer Company for their service to the United States via telephone during their recent deployment ceremony in Rolla, Missouri.

"As you answer the patriotic call to duty upon your deployment, I wish to extend my most heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for your selfless service," said Bond. "To make sure our children enjoy the peace at home earlier generations of Americans could take for granted, we must confront those who seek to develop weapons of mass destruction and terror."

Headquartered in Rolla, with detachments in Salem and Warrenton, the 1438th Engineer Company has been mobilized for Operation Enduring Freedom.

The unit, commanded by Capt. Paul Tague and 1st Sgt. Paul Kennedy, is an assault float ridge company with a mission of providing combat support and rapid river crossing in support of Corps operations. The 1438th was established in 1946 and was activated during the Korean War.

"As you embark on your mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, rest assured in knowing that your mission is a vital and valiant one," said Bond. "There is no cause more noble than answering the call to defend the rights and liberties of freedom loving people."



Keep In Touch Kit Bond

Washington, DC

Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Room 274
Washington, DC 20510-2503
(202) 224-5721

Jefferson City

Office of Constituent Services
308 E. High, Suite 202
Jefferson City, MO 65101
(573) 634-2488
FAX (573) 634-6005

Kansas City

911 Main Street
Suite 2224
Kansas City, MO 64105
(816) 471-7141
FAX (816) 471-7338

St. Louis

7700 Bonhomme, Suite 615
St. Louis, MO 63105
(314) 725-4484
FAX (314) 727-3548

Cape Girardeau

339 Broadway, Room 140
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701
(573) 334-7044
FAX (573) 334-7352

Springfield

1700 S. Campbell
Suite E
Springfield, MO 65807
(417) 864-8258
FAX (417) 864-7519

Cyberspace

<http://bond.senate.gov>



VFW Commander-in-Chief Ray Sisk presents Senator Bond with the 2003 VFW Congressional Award.